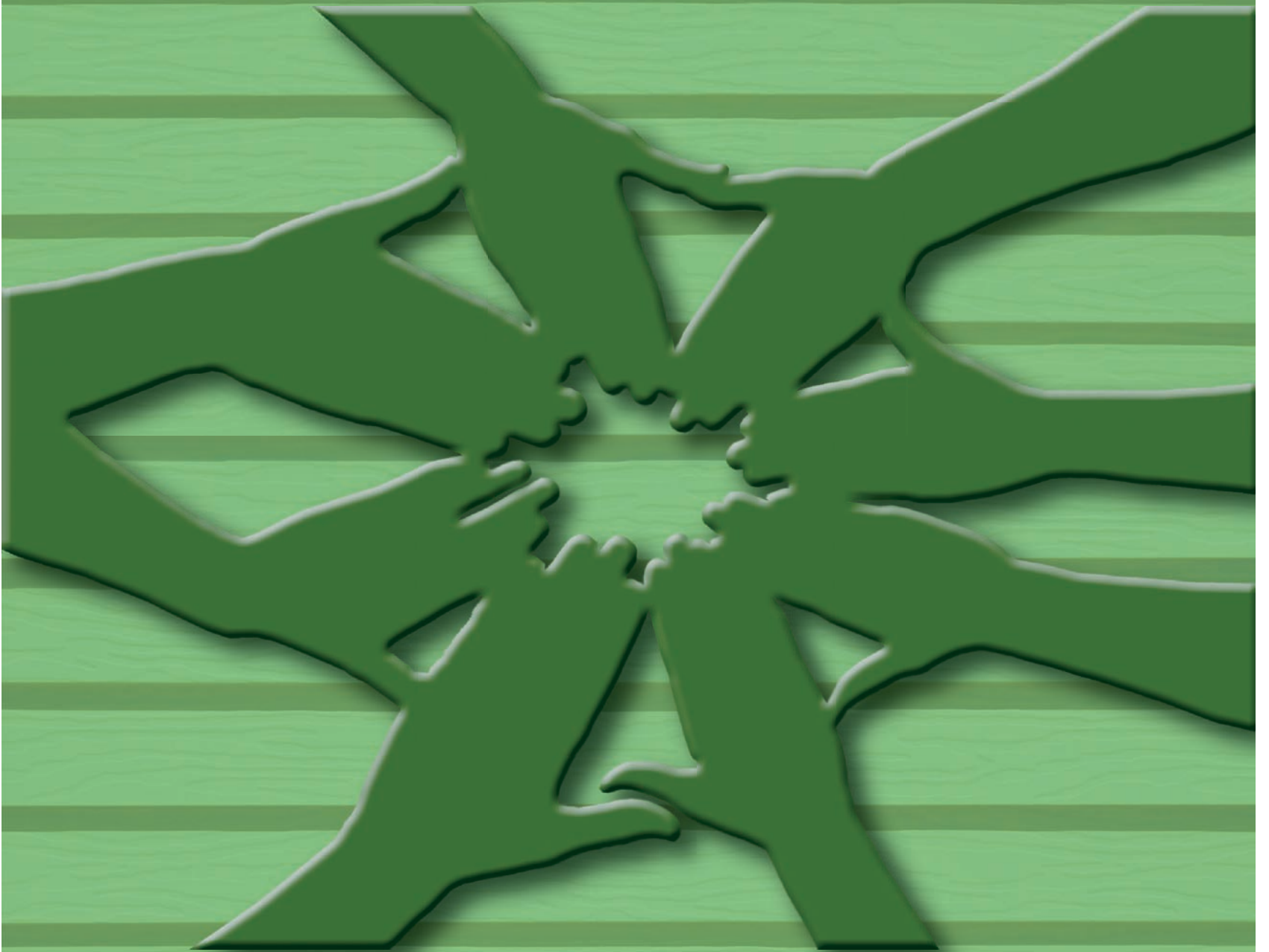


# Immigration and Settlement in Lawrence Heights



**Local Immigration Partnership**

# **IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN LAWRENCE HEIGHTS: A SYNTHESIS REPORT ON COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS**

## **LAWRENCE HEIGHTS LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP**

**OCTOBER 2010**

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### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

#### **Who We Are**

The Lawrence Heights Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) is a group of people such as residents, city and provincial government, schools, community agencies, and grassroots groups<sup>i</sup>. LIP has been formed to identify ways to strengthen supports for immigrant settlement in Lawrence Heights communities. Up to the spring of 2011, LIP will be working on a Settlement and Employment Strategy and Action Plan that will serve as a blueprint for future action and engagement.

The objectives of LIP are to:

- support community planning on the topic of immigrant settlement and integration;
- increase awareness about issues faced by immigrants in the community;
- encourage inclusive community engagement opportunities;
- support the coordination efforts of community service providers in the community;
- further build the capacity and support the sustainability of the community network.

#### **The Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION)**

LHION is a network of resident-led groups, service-providers and other organizations delivering programs and services in the communities of Lawrence Heights, Lotherton Pathways and Neptune – one of 13 priority neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto.

LHION's mission is to build community capacity through collaboration, leadership development and effective use of resources and advocacy.

LHION works together with the City, community partners, and residents using an anti-racism, anti-oppression framework to coordinate efforts towards building healthy and sustainable communities. The LHION is guided by a Steering Committee and its work is carried out by 9 workgroups: Education, Employment and Training, Community Safety, Youth Outreach, Adult Literacy, Food Justice, Lotherton Pathway, Revitalization and the Local Immigration Partnership) which were convened based on community-identified issues.

The project is entirely funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The Local Immigration Partnership functions as a workgroup of the Lawrence Heights Inter-organizational Network (LHION). This is a network of individuals, organizations, and institutions working together to better serve the Lawrence Heights priority neighbourhood.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Purpose of this Report**

In order to build a strong Strategy and Action Plan, LIP has been conducting community consultations to learn directly from newcomers and from those who seek to engage and support them. We wanted to learn about the experience of immigrants who settle in Lawrence Heights, as well as the experience of welcoming them that is the responsibility of the broader community. This document synthesizes what we heard and is meant to be a tool that will help to do 2 key things: 1) outline what LIP heard from the community and 2) act as a springboard for more feedback and conversation from a variety of different sources as we move to build and strengthen the Strategy and Action Plan.

### **Definitions**

The LIP uses a broad definition of ‘immigrant’ to mean anyone who was born abroad and now lives in Canada, regardless of their immigration status. This broad concept of ‘immigrant’ is also sometimes described as ‘newcomer’. Throughout this report, we will be using the word ‘newcomer’ to ensure there is no confusion between those individuals who gained Canadian Citizenship through the immigration process and those who are in the process of becoming citizens or who have no intention of becoming citizens (i.e. some Temporary Foreign Workers). In addition, ‘newcomers’ is not only meant to include those newly arrived individuals, but also those who arrived decades ago.

The term ‘settlement’ also means different things to different people. Depending on who you talk to, the process of settlement and the end result, as well, can look very different. For the purposes of this report, the term ‘settlement’ is defined broadly, including the initial process of arrival and the long-term process of adapting to life in Canada. These processes may include activities that take months or even years to complete, such as enrolling children in school and finding a job. Settlement is a continuous process and requires the participation of community actors and institutions such as schools, doctors, employers, police, the government, recreation centres, neighbours, etc. Settlement is also unique to each individual newcomer. For example, some people might consider themselves ‘settled’ once they get their permanent resident card, while others consider getting a job or getting to know the neighbourhood as pivotal to being ‘settled’. Therefore, throughout LIP’s work, settlement is seen to be determined by the individual.

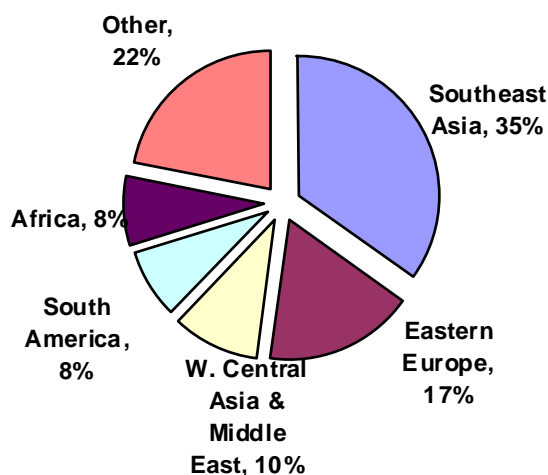
## Lawrence Heights: A Profile Using Data from the 2006 Statistics Canada Census

Toronto is recognized by the United Nations as one of the most ethnically-diverse cities in the World. Lawrence Heights is a neighbourhood in the northwest of Toronto bounded by: Highway 401 to the north, Bathurst Street to the east, Briar Hill Avenue to the south, and the CN railway to the west (just west of Caledonia Road). It is approximately 9.5 square kilometres in area.

As identified by the City of Toronto's Strong Neighbourhood Taskforce, a large portion of the Lawrence Heights population struggles with poor access to services, isolation, and lower socio-economic indicators when compared to the City of Toronto. In 2006, 35,945 people lived in Lawrence Heights.

**Immigration:** According to the 2006 Canada Census, Lawrence Heights has a very large newcomer population comprising just over 51% of residents. More than 16% of those newcomers arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006. The top origins of recent newcomers are detailed in Figure 2. European newcomers from Italy and other parts of Western Europe dominated the population of immigrants in the 1970s and 80s, but are decreasing in numbers.

**Figure 2: Regions of Origin of Recent Newcomers (arrived between 2001 and 2006)**



newcomers are aged 15-24, and 45% are aged 25-44. The rest of Toronto only has 13% of people aged 15-24 years and 32% aged 25 - 44 years.

**Figure 1: City of Toronto's Priority Neighbourhood of Lawrence Heights**



Italian	12%
Filipino/ Tagalog	6%
Spanish	4%
Portuguese	3%
Yiddish	2%
Russian	2%

**Figure 3: Top languages spoken at home**

**Language:** Of all newcomers, almost 5% of the population does not speak English and 47% of the population have a language other than English or French as their mother tongue.

Top languages spoken at home are found in Figure 3.

**Age:** The newcomer population in Lawrence Heights is young and firmly within working age. Almost 24% of

## Lawrence Heights: Understanding Community Needs and Priorities

In recent years, several community groups and planning projects have made a significant effort to learn more about the needs and priorities of different sub-populations of the local demographic<sup>iii</sup>.

**Employment and Training:** The main reasons that respondents cited for not being able to find work is that they do not have sufficient experience (both Canadian and general) and that they don't have enough skills or training. Sometimes they have too many skills, such as newcomers who are 'overqualified' for survival jobs. Among newcomer women, a lack of childcare is the biggest reason for not being able to secure work. Childcare was also the number one reason why people did not access services in the community.

While there is some evidence that newcomers in Lawrence Heights continue to upgrade their skills and pursue education and certification once in Canada. It is not known, however, if this strategy of re-training is effective in securing work.

Many Lawrence Heights residents believe that local businesses should be doing more to hire from the community.

**Community Service Needs:** Studies that looked at the services that people use saw that health, schools and recreation are among the most valued. Where services might be lacking include childcare, daycare, youth and children's programs.

Accessibility of services could also make a big difference – offering childcare, translation, transportation and longer hours beyond 9:00 – 5:00 were leading ways to enhance accessibility according to some studies.

**Community Priorities:** Several projects have been undertaken to help identify the priorities of the Lawrence Heights community. Some of them focused on upcoming change (i.e. Lawrence-Allen Revitalization) and others, more generally, on priorities for community wellness. Figure 4 groups the priorities that were heard through these consultations<sup>iv</sup>.

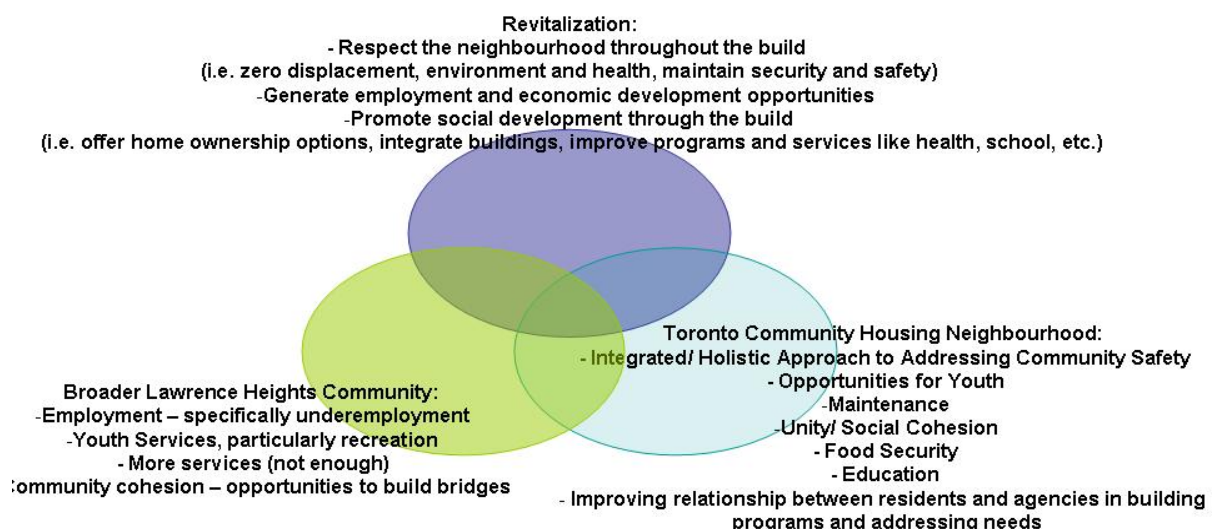


Figure 4: Priorities, as identified through community consultations lead by various groups and projects.



## SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

The LIP Project is being conducted in two stages:

Stage 1: Listening and Learning

Stage 2: Developing Strategy

### **Stage 1: Listening and Learning**

As a part of Stage 1: Listening and Learning, LIP talked to different groups of newcomers about their experiences settling in Lawrence Heights. LIP also spoke to grassroots groups and providers of social services. Generally, the consultations focused on learning about the challenges faced by newcomers and the supports they relied on to overcome those challenges.



*Friday Night Café on “Building an even more Welcoming Lawrence Heights”: Spring 2010*

Different outreach methods were used to ensure we consulted a wide audience of people. Community residents and leaders were hired as Community Animators to work through their personal and professional networks to draw the broader community into the conversations. They reached out using posters, flyers, phone calls, email blasts, and, most importantly, word of mouth. An environmental scan of service providers in the neighbourhood helped to identify key informants from agencies and grassroots groups.

LIP is committed to creating safe spaces for discussion. All activities were constructed with great care to ensure confidentiality and privacy of information. Several approaches were used:

- the identities of participants were protected and their names do not appear in any of the literature;
- informed consent forms were signed by each participant highlighting their right to privacy and to opt-out of the discussions at any point without need for explanation;
- participants were awarded honorariums for their time and effort even if they chose not to answer questions; and
- a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy was used during the recruitment and in constructing the questions, to protect the privacy of participants who, for whatever reason, were uncomfortable disclosing their immigration status.

## **Residents**

### *Community Gatherings*

LIP staged a community discussion (known locally as a *Friday Night Café*) in Lawrence Heights that drew approximately 60 people. Residents discussed the topics of employment; health and food; language; socio-economic issues; information, and orientation, from the perspective of newcomer settlement. The forum also offered the opportunity for participants to identify other themes they felt were important.

LIP has also participated, supported, and attended many other community gatherings in an effort to listen to, and learn about, the different perspectives of residents when it comes to building a more welcoming community.

### *Newcomer Employment Survey*

Taking the opportunity to build on existing research in the community, LIP surveyed 130 working-age newcomers living in Lawrence Heights, to learn about their experiences accessing training, education and work.

### *Focus Groups*

Five focus groups were conducted with newcomers, offering the opportunity for more detailed discussion about challenges and supports. The groups averaged 15 people, sampling approximately 75 people in total. Language-specific groups were conducted in Spanish and Tagalog to encourage participation across language barriers. One group was conducted with newcomers who received their post-secondary education abroad, described by LIP as ‘internationally-trained individuals’, in order to delve deeper into the challenges that newcomers face when integrating into the Canadian labour market.

## **Agencies**

### *Interviews*

Individuals working in agencies and organizations that provide a variety of health and social services were interviewed. The interviews sampled the views of 16 individuals who work directly with newcomer clients and others living in the Lawrence Heights catchment. These conversations with ‘front line workers’ explored the challenges that they see clients to be facing. The interviews also explored the challenges that front line workers face in serving newcomers, and the resources that they use to strengthen their supports.

## **Grassroots Groups and Organizations**

### *Workshops*

Grassroots groups are an important pillar of community development. Therefore, LIP held workshop sessions with 7 resident-led groups to learn about their needs and priorities in serving the community at-large.

## **Limitations**

Efforts were made to get a broad range of input from respondents and barriers were addressed as much as possible. For example, childcare supports were offered during one of the sessions, sessions were held on weekends and evenings to accommodate those who work and go to school, and food and incentives were offered to ensure the sessions were attractive

beyond an inner-circle of respondents. Translation was also offered in some instances and Community Animators were selected to help bridge the conversations so that people with different needs, barriers and apprehensions about the process could also participate.

The overall number of people sampled across the different methods neared 250. This number is too small to represent the vast and diverse community living in Lawrence Heights, nor is it intended to do so. Instead, the findings should be seen as results of conversations held with different members of the Lawrence Heights community.

The results of the consultations with residents and agencies are detailed in individual reports which are available by contacting [lip@jvstoronto.org](mailto:lip@jvstoronto.org) or on the LHION website: [www.lhion.org](http://www.lhion.org). The tools that were used to collect the information and the consent forms that informed participants of their right to anonymity are also available.

### **Stage 2: Developing Strategy**

With the completion of community consultations, LIP is moving towards planning and strategizing towards meeting the ultimate goals of the project (see above). This phase will include outreach and engagements to further set the community priorities and vision and also to identify feasible and measurable responses to key themes and issues.

It will also include further consultations with key informants to help strengthen the goals of the strategy and to bring different stakeholders into the process. Finally, it will include training and capacity building for LIP members that will contribute to the team's ability to implement the Action Plan.

Further consultations will also be a part of this phase to ensure continued feedback from the community.

## **SECTION 3: FINDINGS – WHAT WE HEARD**

### **Challenges**

Participants in the consultation described a wide range of challenges that newcomers face. Some challenges are experienced broadly by all newcomers, some affect the community at-large, while others are specific to particular sub-groups (i.e. refugees, recent newcomers, etc.). Described below are the overarching themes that emerged through the discussions that took place.

#### *Orientation and Information*

Upon arriving in Canada, it can be difficult for newcomers to obtain information specific to their needs. This makes it difficult for newcomers to get oriented as they are often left wondering 'where to start'.

While there is a lot of information about services, programs and 'what you need to do', it tends to be too general, and rarely available in languages other than English. When orientation services do exist in other languages, they are often very popular and have long



wait lists. Participants who required translation during the consultations noted that services in their particular languages were sparse in Lawrence Heights.

Newcomers rely heavily on their social network to become oriented. While social networks play an important role in the settlement process, they can also be sources of misinformation (i.e. out-of-date or inaccurate information).

Among residents there is some distrust of service providers who were sometimes characterized as being more concerned with filling service quotas than with serving clients.

Respondents emphasized that they are looking for information in print and rarely consult the Internet. The most useful source of information comes through human services which allow for more accommodation of language and other needs. The preference to get information in person might help to explain why word-of-mouth is the generally accepted best practice in outreach, information transfer and exchange in Lawrence Heights.

While some specific programs were noted as being very useful, some respondents felt that there is still a lack of readily available and easily accessible basic information that is commonly required by many newcomers. Examples of this include information explaining Canadian laws; how to pay bills; how to read and interpret a contract; how to 'decode' forms (i.e. what is a 'newcomer', what is a 'First Nations' person); etc...

The need for better access to childcare while seeking information, orientation or programming of any kind was emphasized throughout the consultations. This is discussed more fully below.

#### **Some Planning Questions:**

1. How can we collaborate and share information about services and programs for Lawrence Heights more effectively?
2. Are there opportunities to collaborate with grassroots groups and social networks to improve information and orientation outcomes?
3. What is the best way to reach out to newcomers when they first arrive?
4. How do information and orientation needs differ between different groups of newcomers (i.e. women, youth, seniors, refugee, refugee claimants, economic immigrants, family-class immigrants, non-status persons, etc...)?

#### *Language Learning*

Learning English was identified as one of the most important parts of successful settlement, along with employment. Yet, without language capability, it is difficult to find employment so, in many cases, language was seen as the most important element of successful settlement. For those who were not seeking employment, language learning was also a priority, although not necessarily a strong one.

**“If you don’t speak the language, you don’t belong”**

Since language learning is so vital to the settlement process, many newcomers expressed frustration when they were unable to access courses due to waitlists, lack of childcare or other difficulties.

In some cases, respondents were dissatisfied with existing government-funded language training programs such as LINC and ESL. Reasons included poor quality of instruction and curriculum, lack of childcare and strict eligibility requirements that exclude certain groups of newcomers.

On the other hand, LIP also heard from respondents who were satisfied with LINC and ESL programs, underlining the fact that individuals have unique and distinct settlement needs that cannot be generalized.

Many participants described the need for English training to be available at higher levels. Focusing language training on things like pronunciation and occupation-specific training, was seen to be important and also missing from local service offerings. These were described as being important, not only to help newcomers learn the language, but particularly to assist with job searches.

**“No one takes you seriously when you have an accent”**

More flexibility is needed in the schedule of language training classes to accommodate people who are working part-time, taking care of children and/or the elderly, or have other time barriers and restrictions.

More supports, specifically childminding and transportation, are needed for newcomers to access language training programs.

Outside the classroom, continuing to learn and practice English is also challenging because some newcomers do not socialize outside their ethno-cultural networks. Respondents cited reservation, shyness and embarrassment as real barriers to practicing their English in the ‘real world’.

Through the employment survey that LIP conducted in the spring of 2010, it became clear that there is a large population of people in Lawrence Heights who have literacy barriers. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to benefit from existing English Language training. Alternative forms of English language training are welcome in the community where examples might include family ESL, language or cultural exchanges, or conversation circles.

A variety of literacy training programs currently exist in the community. Further support for these programs (whether outreach, translation, childcare, etc.), particularly where they help to offer English language learning opportunities, could go far to combat isolation, another key barrier to settlement success.

**Some Planning Questions:**

1. How do we lessen the language barrier for newcomers accessing information, services, programs, training, and employment opportunities?
2. How can language learning opportunities be improved in Lawrence Heights?
3. How do language learning needs differ between different groups of newcomers (i.e. women, youth, seniors, refugee, refugee claimants, economic newcomers, family-class newcomers, non-status persons, etc...)?

*Access to Healthcare and Wellness*

Accessing healthcare is, at first, very challenging for newcomers, where many respondents cited that it was harder to see a doctor than they expected it to be. Finding a family doctor was seen as a particularly difficult task.

In Ontario, there is a three-month waiting period before newcomers become eligible for provincially-funded health insurance (OHIP). Those individuals who had medical needs within their first three months of arrival described the resulting financial burden as ‘crippling’.

There was overwhelming consensus among all participants that immigration was an emotional and stressful process, regardless of the circumstances that brought newcomers to Canada. The emotional stress was described as often affecting health, family life, finance, faith and self-esteem, as well as overall well-being.

Some described how low-confidence and self-esteem due to difficulty settling and adapting to life in Canada can lead to anxiety and depression. Described as a vicious cycle, the negative impact on mental well-being creates further barriers to employment and other settlement outcomes.

In some cultures, mental health is not recognized as a health issue, and is stigmatized. The need for culturally appropriate mental health initiatives and treatments was most mentioned by frontline workers, who interact with clients on a regular basis.

Respondents also underlined the importance of cultural accommodation and appropriateness. They expressed the need for doctors and other health practitioners to be more sensitive about religious and/or cultural practice.

Too often, respondents felt that low language competency was a barrier to accessing health services. Translation services at healthcare centres are needed and, particularly in primary care centres.

Maintaining good health is complicated when healthy food is not easily accessible, when low-incomes force families to live in sub-standard housing conditions, and/or when doctors don't take the time to educate their patients. Some newcomer respondents agreed that maintaining a healthy diet was much more challenging in Canada than in the country of origin.

**Some Planning Questions:**

1. How can we support health care needs of newcomers during the initial three-month period when they are without OHIP coverage?
2. What programs currently exist in Lawrence Heights that support the health and well-being of newcomers in the community?
3. What programs are needed in the future to support the health and well-being of newcomers in the community?
4. How do health needs differ between different groups of newcomers (i.e. women, youth, seniors, refugee, refugee claimants, economic immigrants, family-class newcomers, non-status persons, etc...)?

*The Job Search*

Looking for a job is never easy. Some respondents admitted they didn't understand proper job-search procedures such as interview etiquette, resume writing, networking, or where to find postings.

Too often, however, when newcomers, particularly internationally-trained individuals, seek support from employment service providers, they feel that they are given "cookie-cutter" services that do not meet their individual needs. They feel that the help they receive is too general, too simplistic, and not relevant to their professional needs.

"We don't go to employment services because all we get is words, and we are tired of words."

At the same time, service providers struggle to clarify their role to newcomers. A common misunderstanding occurs when newcomers believe that non-profit employment agencies can offer them a job. Feelings of betrayal and demoralization can persist when the programs offered by employment services do not result in jobs.

Several respondents felt very strongly that employment service providers need to be doing more to advocate on behalf of newcomers to employers and to governments.

“When I was laid off, I was encouraged to apply to (a government employment program), but when I didn’t get in I wasn’t given any more options – now there is nowhere for me to go.”

There was discussion about the need for more pre-employment and job-readiness services tailored to fit the needs of newcomers. Respondents agreed that, while no one thought finding gainful employment would be easy, very few expected it to be as difficult as it was. All newcomer participants agreed that the majority of their expectations about working in Canada turned out to be false.

There is a demand in the community for information and guidance on starting small businesses. Respondents are looking for information about grants, loans and other sources of financial support, rules and regulations, permits, and microcredit.

A survival job is work that a newcomer accepts in order to make ends meet while continuing to search for work that is more in-line with her or his skills and experience. The survival job, while sometimes a necessary and essential source of income, does not help newcomers get their “foot in the door” of the labour market. In reality, the survival job acts as a barrier to achieving gainful employment, by occupying the newcomer’s time and denying her/him professional development, training, and networking opportunities. A survival job was described as a “dead-end”, especially for internationally-trained individuals who feel unappreciated and undervalued.

“A survival job is also a dead job”

#### **Some Planning Questions:**

1. How can newcomers pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship be supported?
2. How do we tackle hidden discrimination of newcomers in the workforce?
3. How can newcomers gain better access to professional networking opportunities?
4. How do employment needs differ between different groups of newcomers (i.e. women, youth, seniors, refugees, refugee claimants, economic immigrants, family-class immigrants, non-status persons, etc...)?

#### *Foreign Credential Recognition and Skills Upgrading*

It is time-consuming and expensive for a newcomer to get their credentials evaluated and accredited. For some professions, it can take years, during which time skills are unused and risk being lost or becoming out-dated.

Even if a newcomer successfully undergoes a credential evaluation, it does not guarantee that a potential employer will recognize those credentials. Better awareness and, possibly, legislation and regulation is needed to help employers identify newcomer skills.



Many respondents described fleeing countries torn apart by war, where the government and academic institutions they attended either no longer exist or are in states of disarray. These circumstances make it near impossible for their credentials to be evaluated and/or recognized.

Many respondents expressed that if they had the opportunity to upgrade their skills, they would do it. Key areas of interest for upgrading included computer training and small business ownership.

**Some Planning Questions:**

1. What types of training and skills upgrading programs would most benefit newcomers in Lawrence Heights?
2. How do educational and training needs differ between different groups of newcomers (i.e. women, youth, seniors, refugee, refugee claimants, economic immigrants, family-class immigrants, non-status persons, etc...)?

*Youth Services and Supports*

Public schools need to be more culturally competent. Examples include offering culturally-appropriate food in schools, curriculum that reflects local ethno-cultural diversity and programs that allow students to observe religious practice and customs (i.e. girls-only swimming lessons).

Some parents exhibited particular concern that their children were ‘losing their native culture’ and, at the same time, failing to adjust effectively to Canadian culture.

It was not uncommon for parents to express dissatisfaction with the standards of the Canadian education system.

“The Canadian system places more pressure on children to ‘fit in’ rather than to ‘achieve’”

Newcomer respondents felt that schools needed to provide better translation services to facilitate parent discussions with teachers.

Respondents also felt that more outreach was needed to help parents better understand the school system and how it works, what is ‘normal’ and how to become involved.

Beyond school-based enrolment and programming, parents sometimes do not have complete information about which recreational and sports programs are available to youth and how to enrol them in programs. More simple and streamlined access to recreational programs is needed.

Many respondents, including youth themselves, felt that youth in the community need stronger role models from their own ethno-cultural communities to assist with programming and to act as volunteers in support of local youth.

**Some Planning Questions:**

1. What is the role of schools in supporting the settlement of newcomer families?
2. How does the settlement experience of newcomer youth differ from the settlement experience of their parents?
3. Do second generation newcomer youth require settlement support?

*Discrimination, Conflict and the need for Cultural Competency*

Hidden or systemic discrimination was often felt through the job-search process by newcomer respondents. One participant described having over two years of Canadian work experience and being told by a prospective employer that it wasn't enough to qualify as "Canadian experience".

"When is your experience enough to qualify as "Canadian Work Experience?"

Systemic discrimination was described by others who find themselves ineligible for services and programs due to a lack of immigration status.

Some respondents felt that Canadian society needs to be more culturally sensitive so that newcomers can participate fully without compromising their own values, beliefs and culture.

The need to build bridges across cultural lines is often ignored. While few respondents actually highlighted this as a concern or a need, broader discussions in the community and with community leaders, specifically, suggests that more inter-cultural dialogue could help to strengthen the community base. It is widely believed that more social cohesion would help to combat challenges like alienation and isolation which fuel conflicts of various kinds. Community-based programs and offerings that serve as a model for building such inter-cultural dialogue exist and could be explored as a starting point.

"We are looked at differently because of the way we dress, our culture, traditions, and particularly our religion."

**Some Planning Questions:**

1. How do we better celebrate the ethno-cultural diversity of Lawrence Heights?
2. How do we better fight overt, hidden, and systemic racism and discrimination?
3. Are existing services and programs in Lawrence Heights culturally relevant or appropriate? How can they be more culturally competent?

## **Opportunities**

Throughout LIP's consultations, we heard about many bright points in the Lawrence Heights social, physical, and economic tapestry.

These will be further explored through the development of the Strategy and Action Plan as we look for resources that will help tackle challenges to settlement in the neighbourhood.

### *Resident Leadership*

Through the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization, residents have been taking an increasingly central role in community building as Community Animators. Community Animators are local residents who conduct outreach to bring residents to forums where they can explore and contribute to different topics that affect the community.

The presence of Animators is valued in the community as a source of local employment, a resource that helps people understand the changes that are coming with Revitalization, and a vehicle to help capture the voice of the community.

### **The Lawrence-Allen Revitalization**

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), Toronto's largest landlord, built housing in the Lawrence-Allen area in the 1950s. The TCHC communities consist of 1,208 low-density residential units. Planning to rebuild and revitalize the TCHC Lawrence Heights and Neptune lands began in 2007 and in July of 2010, Toronto City Council approved the plan.

The project will replace deteriorating housing units; install new market housing and increase the population density of the area; improve the layout of streets and buildings in the neighbourhood; and engage and support the community towards the creation of a Social Development Plan.

The project is seen by community members and workers as an opportunity for progress and change. Residents are particularly excited by the prospect that the build might generate local employment throughout the construction and might create opportunities for socio-economic integration and development with the broader community. These aspects are being explored by the City of Toronto's Social Development Planning process.

Community Animators also have the potential to be connectors providing a constant flow of information between the community and the agencies that serve them. Further exploration of the model is needed to look at enhancing the role of Community Animators.

#### *Partnerships and Agency Collaboration*

The Lawrence Heights community is home to a strong inter-organizational network known as LHION (described on page 1, above). LHION provides continuous opportunity for many different community stakeholders to come together and build on one another's strengths to better serve the community.

The network model has given rise to partnerships among service-providers which have sought to share resources and bring new ones into the community.

The model is also exploring ways in which to establish ongoing community-agency relationships. The intention is to better understand the needs of the community in order to respond more effectively, whether through the provision of supports or through a search for resources.

#### *Grassroots Organizing*

Grassroots organizing is a type of civic engagement where people come together to identify their needs and priorities without the assistance of an external body or process. It is a process that often looks patchy and unstable, when in reality this is the natural character of the grassroots where flexibility is offered and activity tends to concentrate around specific needs or events.

Lawrence Heights is home to a vast tapestry of old and young groups with old and young members with tremendous capacity to tap into the needs of the community.

Unfortunately, grassroots groups don't often describe themselves as a resource, but rather as being *in need* of resources. There is an opportunity to bring groups together to look at ways of supporting one another to strengthen their functioning.

#### **BePart: An Example of Community-based Partnership for Change**

BePart is a community-led research project based in the TCHC communities of Lawrence Heights and Neptune. It emerged from the initiative of resident leaders and local agencies who support the development of a better understanding of community from the ground-up. It was also identified as a meaningful opportunity for residents looking to come out and get involved in community building.

Its work is guided by the BePart Steering Committee. The goals of BePart are to:

- Undertake research that leads to effective community action and improvement;
- Build networks, connections, and bonds between people across the community;
- Build trust and the capacity for residents and agencies to learn and work together;
- Connect across the neighbourhood to create a shared vision for the future

More information about BePART can be found at [www.bepart.ca](http://www.bepart.ca)

Of the 7 grassroots groups that were consulted, each one identified the need for resources to continue their core functions as the main obstacle. The other obstacle common to each group was sustenance of membership. Supporting grassroots groups to come together and explore their mutual goals, needs and assets is important in enhancing an already welcoming Lawrence Heights.

### **Vision for the Future**

Throughout the LIP consultations we asked participants to talk about their vision for the future. Specifically, we wondered: “how can Lawrence Heights be an even more welcoming community for newcomers and Canadian-born residents alike?”

#### *More Effective Information, Referral and Orientation*

- Using a variety of methods to keep up-to-date information on programs and services and continuously update the information.
- Create an online and hardcopy newsletter to keep residents informed about programs and services in the community. Provide proper outreach so that residents actually receive the newsletter.
- Explore new avenues of outreach and referral such as the Community Recreation Centre.

#### *Orientation to Work and Job Readiness*

- Explore partnerships that could create employment such as the Revitalization Development project.
- Combine settlement services with employment services, so that residents can have all-in-one services and not be referred from agency to agency.
- Find the right balance between job-readiness services and job development services. Participants felt that currently there is too much focus on the former and not enough on the latter.

#### *Youth Alienation*

- Programs that help youth access post-secondary education are extremely important but should also include opportunities that expose youth to diverse professions. Currently only the police force and fire department provide this exposure.
- Provide more free tutoring for youth.
- Offer classes that help youth learn and practice their mother tongues or the mother tongue of their parents.
- Give parents accurate and timely information about opportunities for youth advancement.



### *Supporting Employment*

- Employers recognize the credentials of internationally-trained individuals and credential evaluation is easier and less expensive.
- Provide affordable childcare to job seekers.
- Explore the possibility of providing alternative housing arrangements for Live-in Caregivers who spend the weekend away from their employers' homes.
- Support programs that offer newcomers paid positions and internships, preferably in their fields, An example is wage subsidy programs.
- Create more mentorship opportunities for internationally-trained individuals.
- Explore ways of combating discrimination and favouritism in the labour market.
- Offer newcomers scholarships to help them access education, training, and skills upgrading opportunities.

### *Health and Wellness*

- Offer psychological counselling services to help newcomers overcome emotional hurdle and mental health barriers.
- Offer more programs for seniors and people with disabilities.

### *Engagement and Community Participation*

- Development and maintenance of community spaces and forums and sponsorship of programs that include and engage residents throughout their development and planning process.
- Engage the community around issues identified by the community.
- Support capacity-building and community leadership development.
- Sponsor community-led efforts to organize and engage others.
- Create programs that embrace full family participation, across ages and abilities.
- Further development and preservation of existing forums and programs like the Friday Night Café and Community Education for Action and Community Leadership that strive to bring people together across cultural divides and break down inter-cultural barriers.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> At the time of publication, the Lawrence Heights LIP is made up of the East African Community Association, Family Services Toronto, Toronto Employment and Social Services, North York Harvest Food Bank, City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration, Lawrence Heights Family Support Group, Toronto Public Library, CUPE 4400 (TDSB Education Workers), City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Commonwealth of Dominica Ontario Association, Community Action Team Lawrence Heights, City of Toronto Public Health, Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Ogaden Somali Community Association, The Career Foundation, North York Community House, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Frontier College.

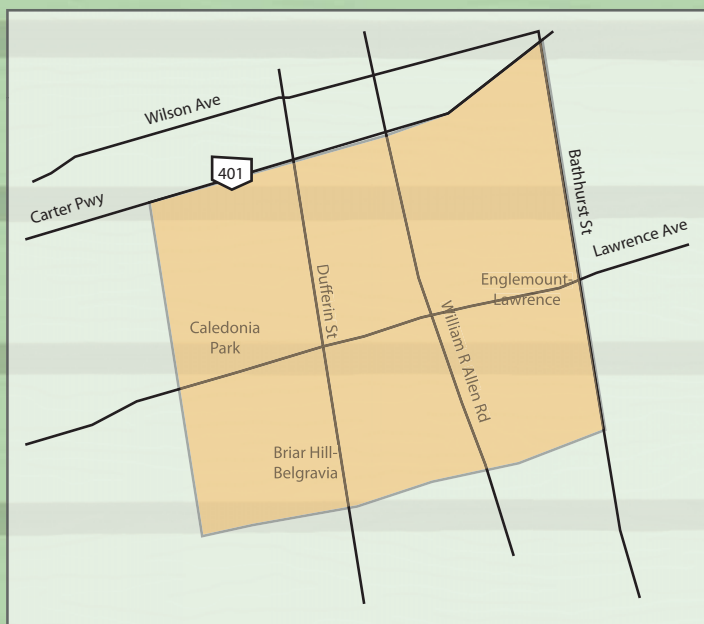
<sup>ii</sup> In 2004 the United Way, together with the City of Toronto formed the Strong Neighbourhood Taskforce to build an Action Plan for revitalizing Toronto neighbourhoods. Through the taskforce, Lawrence Heights was identified as one of thirteen priority neighbourhoods where public investment in local services has not kept pace with population growth and increasing social needs.

<sup>iii</sup> For further reading, see:

- TESS-TCHC Lawrence Heights Employment Survey, 2009. Contact Barbarar Taylor, Community and Labour Market Manager Lawrence Square Employment & Social Services. Tel: (416) 397-1609. Email: [btaylor4@toronto.ca](mailto:btaylor4@toronto.ca);
- Londono, Fresia. Lawrence Heights Community Needs Assessment, 2010. Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development. [www.tcld.org/estorage/LAWRENCE%20HEIGHTS%20-%20Fresia.docx](http://www.tcld.org/estorage/LAWRENCE%20HEIGHTS%20-%20Fresia.docx);
- Lawrence Heights Local Immigration Partnership Newcomer Employment Survey Results 2010. [lip@jvstoronto.org](mailto:lip@jvstoronto.org) or [www.lhion.org](http://www.lhion.org).

<sup>iv</sup> For further reading, see:

- Londono, Fresia. Lawrence Heights Community Needs Assessment, 2010. Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development.
- BePART. Residents & Agencies Working & Learning Together, 2010. BePART Steering Committee and Lawrence Heights Inter-Organizational Network (LHION). [www.bepart.ca](http://www.bepart.ca)
- Toronto Community Housing and LHION. Lawrence Heights Community Priorities Framework, 2007. (prepared by Sanrda M. Gonzalez Ponce).
- Community Action Team. Lawrence Heights Grassroots Community Priorities for Revitalization, 2008.
- Lawrence Heights Neptune Revitalization – Social Development – What We’ve Heard. City of Toronto, Department of Social Development, Finance and Administration, 2010. For more information, contact Dena Warman at [dwarman@toronto.ca](mailto:dwarman@toronto.ca)



The Lawrence Heights Local Immigration Partnership is one of 17 such community-based planning tables in the City of Toronto, established with funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The partnerships are primarily focused on enhancing the settlement success of newcomers in priority neighbourhoods.

The Lawrence Heights table is made up of multiple stakeholders, including residents, social service providers, and governments.

**For more information on the  
Lawrence Heights Local Immigration Partnership,  
or to learn how to get involved, contact:**

**lip@jvstoronto.org  
(416) 787-1151 ext. 253**

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